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UNCLAS GUATEMALA 000526

SIPDIS

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E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: RESUMPTION OF FTAA TNC AND NEXT STEPS

REF: STATE 30377

With us on the Plurilateral Agreement

[¶1.](#) (SBU) EconCouns discussed resumption of FTAA Trade Negotiating Committee activities (reftel) with Vice Minister of Economy for Trade and Integration Eduardo Sperisen on March 1. Sperisen fully agreed on the importance of moving ahead quickly and across the board on a high-quality plurilateral agreement among the G-14, and he looked forward to meeting in Puebla on March 17.

But Not On Costa Rica as Representative

[¶2.](#) (SBU) Sperisen raised the smaller group meeting with the five allies and Mercosur in Buenos Aires. He said he understood the thinking behind keeping the meeting small but was annoyed that Costa Rica had been chosen as the Central American representative. He noted that Costa Rica had been used by the U.S. as coordinator with the Central Americans in Puebla despite not being represented at the vice ministerial level. He also noted that Guatemala was president pro-tempore of the Central American Integration System (SICA) for 2004 and, should, per normal protocol, speak for the sub-region. He lamented the damage done to Guatemala's reputation by the recently departed Portillo Administration and hoped that the recovery would not take too long.

[¶3.](#) (SBU) Comment: The Guatemalans are still annoyed with Costa Rican behavior at the end of the "final" CAFTA round in Washington and their lack of enthusiasm for building a customs union. It was particularly clear that Sperisen disliked being "coordinated" in Puebla by Costa Rica's Fernando Ocampo, whom the Guatemalans seem to hold in particular contempt.

HAMILTON